

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERALISM AND THE CENSUS
MARCH 13, 2006

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*Brownfields in the 50 States: Are State Incentive
Programs Capable of Solving America's Brownfields Problem?*

It is my privilege to address the Honorable Members of the Subcommittee on Federalism and the Census. I am particularly enthusiastic about this committee's commitment to redeveloping our nation's Brownfields.

My company, the Georgetown Land Development Company, LLC, (GLDC) is the owner and developer of the former Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill in the Georgetown section of Redding, Connecticut. GLDC is somewhat unique in that we are a socially conscious real estate development firm, which integrates smart growth ideals with sustainable green development principles.

The former Wire Mill GLDC is currently developing is a 55 acre Brownfield with more than 35 buildings that were used in the manufacturing process. The project is adjacent to Route 7, a major Connecticut artery that runs between Danbury and Norwalk. The property also has the Danbury spur of Metro North running along side it and the Norwalk river running through it. We are transforming the site into a mixed use, pedestrian friendly, transit oriented development that will include 416 residential units, more than 350,000 square feet of Commercial/Retail space and create more than 1,500 permanent jobs, as documented by the University of Connecticut's Center for Economic Analysis.

The Wire Mill project earned Redding, Connecticut the Smart Growth Award for Small Communities from the US EPA and is one of only 4 developments in the country to earn a designation from the US Department of Treasury as a Qualified Green Building and Sustainable Design project.

What I would like to talk about today is the process we went through to get this point and how coordinating public involvement while integrating transportation with planning has worked for this project. We expect to break ground in April, evidence that if you develop consensus, large complex projects can get done relatively quickly.

The most important point I can make today is that GLDC's process can be replicated and used as model across the United States.

In 2000 the Town of Redding enlisted the services of Connecticut architect and planner Patrick Pinnell to help them understand what could happen with this site. He focused the Town on the possibility of redeveloping the Georgetown section into a village environment or "town center". He suggested using "New Urbanist" or "Traditional

Neighborhood Development” principles. We listened to what Pinnell advised the Town and studied his recommendations. In 2002 we made a proposal to the Town of Redding to purchase the outstanding tax liens secured by the Wire Mill and, as part of our presentation, suggested a development that created a traditional neighborhood. We also agreed to hold a Charrette, which would involve the Town in the planning process. This process included making known to the public the results from a full environmental investigation of the site. We were awarded the liens, closed in September of 2002 and acquired the deed to property from the previous owner in October 2002.

We spent the better part of the following year stabilizing the property, doing the preliminary engineering work needed for the Charrette and completing the environmental investigation of the site. In October of 2003 we held a week long Charrette, attended by over 1,000 residents, which resulted in a conceptual plan. This plan included ideas and suggestions from many of those who participated.

The Charrette process included input from the US EPA, the National Park Service, CT DEP, local planning and zoning officials, historic preservationists, land use stakeholders, various departments from ConnDOT and many others. US EPA and CT DEP officials discussed the environmental characterization findings and how a suggested remediation plan could be integrated with the development. The National Park Service discussed ways for the Weir Farm historic site’s maintenance facility and archives to remain a tenant. The ConnDOT officials specifically discussed the transportation segment of the development. Early on in our planning process we identified that the reactivation of the former Georgetown train station would be a critical component to the success of the project. Furthermore, we looked for ways to accommodate the Norwalk to Danbury bus line and plan for a pedestrian friendly village atmosphere while accommodating vehicles. The Charrette was very instructive and gave us a solid framework for the Master Plan.

The interactive nature of the process continued as we worked closely with US EPA, CT DEP, ConnDOT, the Town of Redding and many local residents from throughout the area. From these discussions we engaged some of the most talented development professionals in the State of Connecticut to develop a Master Plan. That plan was presented to the Town of Redding in June of 2004. Our lead architect, Dave Beem with Roger Ferris and Partners in Westport, Connecticut coordinated this effort with architectural, engineering and law firms from all over Connecticut. Some of these firms included architects from Bienfeld Architecture (South Norwalk), Fasey-Smith Architects (Wilton), and Perkins Eastman (Stamford) and engineers from Fuss & O’Neill (Manchester), Tighe & Bond (Shelton) and Fitzgerald and Halliday (Hartford), as well as attorneys from Brody, Wilkinson and Ober (Southport), Shipman and Goodwin (Hartford) and Wake, See, Dimes (Westport). Our plan was referred to the Towns of Wilton, Weston and Ridgefield as well as The Southwestern Regional Planning Agency (SWPA) and the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials (HVCEO). In September of 2004 we received unanimous approval with no appeal – a unique accomplishment for any development of this size.

With that local approval in hand we met with State agencies and started the approval process at the State level. Based on comments from these agencies, in June of 2005 we revised the plan, had the change approved by the Town of Redding and submitted our

application to the State Traffic Commission for a Major Traffic Generator Permit, a permit needed to start construction on a project of this size.

It was because of the process the Town of Redding undertook early in 2000 and the results that came about from that process, that the US Environmental Protection Agency awarded the Town of Redding the National Award for Smart Growth Achievement in the Small Communities category. This award was one of only 6 granted in 2005. The national recognition this project has earned speaks to the process and its result. More important, it shows that the efforts of the US EPA to promote Brownfield development is taking root -- not only in urban areas but in suburban locations as well. The fact that Best Practices are catalogued, information on development trends and processes are shared and organizations supported with US EPA grants are able to communicate with each other is a testament to the process.

There is still much to do on our redevelopment of the former Wire Mill but the planning process has prepared the way for this development's success. We are currently getting our final approvals from various departments at Connecticut DEP and expect to be on the agenda next month for the State Traffic Commission for our Major Traffic Generator Permit. This permit includes designs for a relocated rail crossing as well as the reactivated Georgetown Train Station, a critical element of making the "village" work.

In April we will be breaking ground on the expanded Town of Redding Waste Water Treatment Facility, which will be financed by the US Department of Agriculture Rural Development Loan program. Without wastewater treatment there is no development. Although this essential component is being financed by the USDA, many developers had been unaware that USDA programs could assist in any way with Brownfield redevelopment. We owe thanks to the US EPA for encouraging the USDA to attend Brownfield conferences to showcase their programs and demonstrate how and where they work.

Next month we expect to start demolition of non-essential and unstable structures thanks in part to Small Cities Community Development Block Grant, a HUD program administered by the State of Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development, announced by Governor M. Jodi Rell on Friday February 17. Later this year we will use bond proceeds from our allocation of Green Bonds for demolition, remediation, infrastructure and commercial development. These Green Bonds are part of the special designation we received from US Treasury, which designated our development as a Green Building and Sustainable Design project. This designation included a referral from US EPA to confirm aspects of our application. It represents another of the many State and Federal programs needed to make a complex Brownfield development, like the Wire Mill, viable. We earned the Green Building and Sustainable Design project designation in January of this year because of the project's commitment to environmentally sound policies and practice, including the creation of alternative energy on site and constructing LEED certified buildings planned for the development.

The model we have developed and our experience has taught us that Best Practices, when used in a transparent public/private partnership, work. Integrating environmental remediation with economic development and transportation planning is critical to the success of any project.

We also believe that the 450,000 or so Brownfield sites that exist throughout the country will be difficult to redevelop at best. Developers over the past ten years have identified and “cherry picked” the best sites. The next ten years will be a new era of Brownfield development when the most challenging and difficult sites are the only ones left. Using various aspects of our model, creating a true public/private partnership and “stacking” State and Federal resources, is the only way many of these sites will get developed.

US EPA has done a tremendous job setting the stage for redevelopment of these sites. The fact is however, that for successful reuse of these sites to move forward, developers will need Capital, Capital and Capital: Political Capital, Intellectual Capital and Financial Capital. The Political Capital, in many cases, already exists. It comes from very real frustration -- people being sick and tired of being sick and tired. The intellectual capital has initially been provided by US EPA. They have worked hard to lay the groundwork by educating cities and states about the Brownfield process and by providing various tools to economic development professionals. The Financial Capital is the most difficult to obtain. Financial risks demand a return proportionate to the risk. In situations where the risk is real, or even perceived, a higher financial reward will be required.

The best method for increasing the flow of capital is for federal policy to reflect the critical importance of revitalizing America’s cities and towns, now impaired by an industrial legacy. Providing federal tax credits is arguably the best, most straightforward method of creating an equity pool to achieve this goal.

Respectfully submitted,
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